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C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 000145

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

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SUBJECT: MYSTERY OF MURDERED PRIEST

Classified By: COM Jonathan Farrar for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The murder on February 14, 2009 of Spanish Priest Eduardo de la Fuente remains an unsolved crime. The official Cuban media has said nothing about the incident, even though murder is a rarity in Cuba. Nevertheless, the murder is a frequent topic of conversation among ordinary Cubans. People have been proposing several theories about the murder. Based on the unusual level of violence inflicted on the victim, many people are saying that it was a crime of passion. However, residents of the neighborhood of Lawton, where Father Eduardo served as parish priest, suggest that the murder occurred during a robbery. As far as USINT knows, all of these theories are speculation without any specific basis in fact. Lawton residents hope that the incident will bring attention to the growing problem of crime in the neighborhood. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On February 14, the body of Spanish Priest Eduardo de la Fuente Serrano was found in a ditch near the National Zoo in Havana. He reportedly had been stabbed, but there were also indications that he had been beaten by fists and that there had been an attempt at strangulation. His burned out vehicle was found 20 kilometers away from the crime scene in the town of Bauta. The priest had been visiting Cuba regularly for the past 10 years. For the past three years he served as the parish priest for the church of Santa Clara de Asisi in the neighborhood of Lawton in Havana. On February 18, close to a thousand people attended a memorial mass for him.

¶3. (C) The Cuban media, which is normally adverse to publicizing negative stories on subjects such as crime or accidents, has published nothing about the murder. USINT officials have discussed the case with senior officials of the Catholic Church. The Church officials said that they have no more information about the crime than has been released publicly. The Church has been informed that the police are investigating the case, but church officials stated that they have not been notified about any progress in the investigation.

¶4. (C) Comment: USINT is watching for developments in this case. There is no information to indicate that the victim was targeted in his role as a priest. The Cuban public was shocked by this case, and will be watching closely to see if any news is leaked to the foreign press about progress in the investigation.

